Notice of Proposed Action

County Line Project

Aspen-Sopris Ranger District
White River National Forest
Garfield, Pitkin and Mesa County, Colorado

Portions of Sections 19, and 28-33, T7S, R89W; Sections 4-9, T8S, R89W; and Sections 1-3 and 10-12, T8S, R90W, 6th Principal Meridian, Garfield County, Colorado and portions of Sections 16-21 and 28-30, T8S, R89W; Sections 13-15, 21-29, and 32-34, T8S, R90W; Sections 3-7, T9S, R89W; and Sections 1, 4, 5, and 12, T9S, R90W, 6th Principal Meridian, Pitkin County, Colorado and portions of Sections 15, 21, and 22, T8S, R90W, 6th Principal Meridian, Mesa County, Colorado.

Comments Welcome

The Aspen-Sopris Ranger District of the White River National Forest welcomes your comments on its proposal to implement the County Line project located in the Fourmile Park area. Your comments will help us complete an environmental assessment. The assessment will be used to determine whether to prepare an environmental impact statement or a finding of no significant impact. Instructions for submitting comments are described on the last page.

Background

The County Line Project is located within the Fourmile Creek, Camp Creek-East Divide Creek, Thompson Creek and Edgerton Creek-Crystal River watersheds located southwest of Glenwood Springs, Colorado and west of Carbondale, Colorado. The project area encompasses approximately 33,300 acres of National Forest System Lands and is characterized by a mosaic of forest intermixed with large natural openings.

The project area contains several cover-types including aspen, mixed conifer, grass, and shrublands. Within individual stands, species composition can be varied with some areas growing in pure stands while others contain a mix of species. Within the aspen cover-type there is currently a lack of age class diversity. Less than 1% of aspen stands are classified as young stands. Within some mature stands there are small areas of natural regeneration, however growth rates are hindered and mortality rates are high due to grazing and foraging pressure from cattle and wildlife. In other areas of the project, mature aspen are beginning to show signs of decline such as a loss of vigor in tree crowns along with dead or dying trees.

Currently, within the mixed conifer cover-type (Engelmann spruce – subalpine fir) there is an outbreak of western spruce budworm which is resulting in defoliation of mature spruce and fir trees within the project area. Advanced regeneration occurring within the understory are

more susceptible to the defoliation caused by the western spruce budworm, which can result in mortality of individuals and small groups.

The project area also supports a variety of motorized and non-motorized recreation including camping, hunting, hiking, snowmobiling, and cross country skiing. Other uses of the area include natural gas development, communications sites, grazing, commercial timber harvest and a developed downhill ski area.

Purpose and Need for Action

The purpose of the proposed action is to:

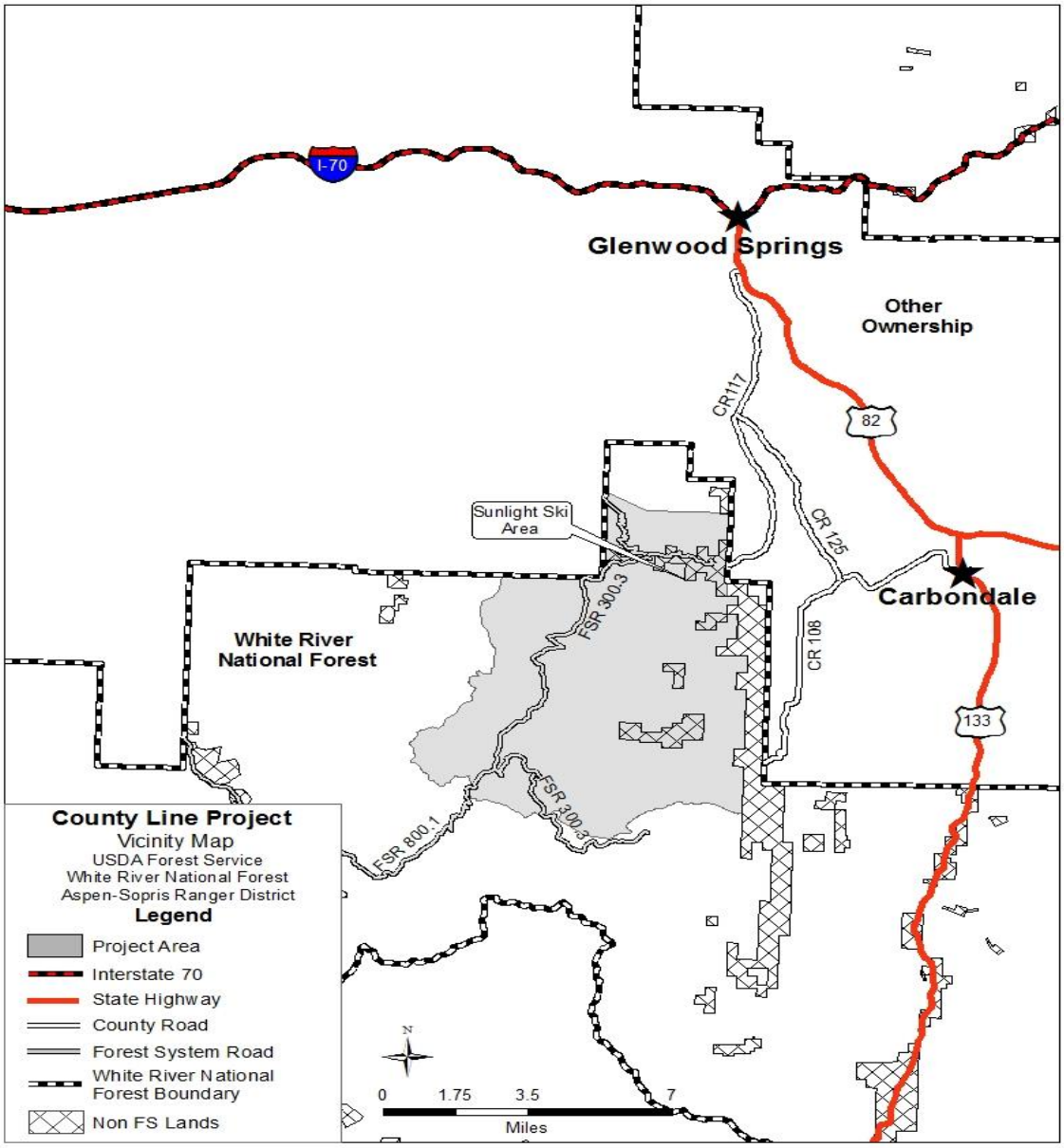
- Improve forest resilience to potential future disturbances by maintaining or increasing age and size class diversity at the stand and landscape scale.
- Provide commercial forest products and / or biomass to local industries.
- Use prescribed fire to improve wildlife habitat while reducing the area's susceptibility to large scale, severe wildfire effects.
- Maintain or improve forest health conditions including stand resilience in forested areas located within permitted areas on the Sunlight Ski area.
- Enhance recreation opportunities to improve safety and access and reduce conflicts.
- Improve current and future rock material supply to support road and facility maintenance and construction.

The proposed action is needed because:

- Young aspen stands are under-represented across the landscape; while some mature stands are beginning to convert to Engelmann spruce and subalpine fir.
- Forest resiliency is lacking across the landscape due, in part, to the absence of age and size class diversity in both aspen and mixed conifer stands.
- Local and regional timber markets exist that can process forest products.
- Natural disturbance processes have been and will continue to be suppressed in a landscape that was previously adapted to wildfire.
- Healthy stands of trees that retain forest cover over the long term are desirable to maintain a positive guest experience in recreation based settings.
- Recreation opportunities, access, and public safety can be improved from the existing conditions.

- Development of local rock materials will better support present and continued road and facility maintenance.

Figure 1: County Line Project Vicinity Map[1]



[1] All maps in this document are reproduced from geospatial information prepared by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service. GIS data and product accuracy may vary. They may be: developed from sources of differing accuracy, accurate only at certain scales, based on modeling or interpretation, incomplete while being created or revised, etc. Using GIS products for purposes other than those for which they were created may yield inaccurate or misleading results. The Forest Service reserves the right to correct, update, modify, or replace, GIS products based on new inventories, new or revised information, and if necessary in conjunction with other federal, state, or local public agencies or the public in general as required by policy or regulation. Previous recipients of the products may not be notified unless required by policy or regulation. For more information, contact the White River National Forest at (970) 945-2521.

Proposed Action

The Forest Service is proposing a variety of projects not only to meet the purpose and need, but to address additional resource concerns within the project area. Proposed projects include:

- Forest health and vegetation management treatments on approximately 1,597 acres of National Forest System lands using traditional logging methods.
- Fuels management and wildlife habitat improvements on approximately 13,661 acres of National Forest System lands using prescribed fire treatments.
- Forest health assessment and treatments on approximately 2,390 acres of National Forest System lands within the Sunlight Ski Area Special Use Permit boundary.
- Fuel reduction treatments adjacent to existing infrastructure located at the Sunlight Communications site.
- Glading treatments on approximately 47 acres of National Forest System lands within the Sunlight Ski Area Special Use Permit boundary.
- Winter recreation improvements along FSR 300 including a parking area for winter non-motorized recreation use and construction of a snowmobile route.
- Move the existing gate located at the kiosk on FSR 300 to a location further south along the road to improve access for Christmas tree collection.
- Expand the existing borrow site located on FSR 300 to provide rock material for use in maintenance and reconstruction of roads and other facilities located on National Forest System lands.

I. Vegetation Management

Vegetation management activities are proposed on approximately 1,597 (+/- 10%) acres of forested land using a variety of silvicultural treatments including coppice clearcut and group selection (Figure 2 and Figure 3).

Table 1: Proposed Vegetation Management Activities

Unit Number	Dominate Cover Type	Treatment Prescription	Acres (+/- 10%)	Management Area
101	Spruce – fir	Group Selection	133	5.12
102	Spruce – fir	Group Selection	152	5.12
103	Spruce – fir	Group Selection	170	5.12
104	Spruce – fir	Individual Tree Selection	103	5.12
105	Spruce – fir	Group Selection	17	5.12
106	Spruce – fir	Group Selection	43	5.12
107	Spruce – fir	Group Selection	56	5.12
108	Spruce – fir	Group Selection	38	5.12
109	Spruce – fir	Group Selection	219	5.13
110	Spruce – fir	Group Selection	128	5.13, 5.4
Total Group Selection / Individual Tree Selection Acres			**1,059**	

Unit Number	Dominate Cover Type	Treatment Prescription	Acres (+/- 10%)	Management Area
201	Aspen	Coppice	86	8.25
202	Aspen	Coppice	17	4.3, 5.12
203	Aspen	Coppice	36	4.3, 5.12
204	Aspen	Coppice	99	4.3, 5.12
205	Aspen	Coppice	26	4.3, 5.12
206	Aspen	Coppice	30	5.12
207	Aspen	Coppice	112	5.12
208	Aspen	Coppice	26	5.12
209	Aspen	Coppice	21	5.12
210	Aspen	Coppice	59	5.12
211	Aspen	Coppice	26	5.13
		Total Coppice Acres	**538**	
Total Project Acres			**1,597**	

Silvicultural Prescriptions

Group Selection and Individual Tree Selection

Group Selection and Individual Tree Selection prescriptions are proposed in areas dominated by Engelmann spruce and subalpine fir. These prescriptions seek to initiate a new age class while maintaining a mature overstory. In units identified to be treated utilizing a group selection prescription, small openings one-half to two acres in size would be created where all trees greater than 5" diameter at breast height (DBH) would be removed. Openings would be located at least 2 tree lengths from one another and would be dispersed throughout the proposed treatment areas. Cumulatively, group openings would not exceed 20-25% of a unit's total size.

Units proposed to be treated utilizing an individual tree selection prescription would remove individual trees to provide favorable conditions for the establishment of a new age class. Subalpine fir and Engelmann spruce with poor form would be favored for removal. Tree removal would not exceed 30% of the total basal area of the stand.

Coppice

A coppice prescription is proposed in areas dominated by aspen. Treatment areas were identified across the project area where aspen clones are mature and are generally experiencing declining tree vigor. In units identified to be treated utilizing a coppice prescription all trees greater than 2 inches DBH would be removed. Treated areas would be expected to regenerate as aspen via root suckering, creating a new age class of aspen.

Implementation Methods

Conventional ground based logging systems are planned for tree removal over the majority of this project including: rubber tired skidders, track skidders and rubber tired or track mechanized harvesters. Logging activities (cutting, felling, yarding, temporary road construction and obliteration, road maintenance and road reconstruction) may occur year round as weather and ground conditions allow.

In order to provide special forest products to the public, small commercial or personal use sales may be used in part to accomplish treatment objectives. Slash piles and non-merchantable material may be burned and/or removed for biomass utilization.

Figure 2: Proposed Vegetation Management Treatment Areas (North)

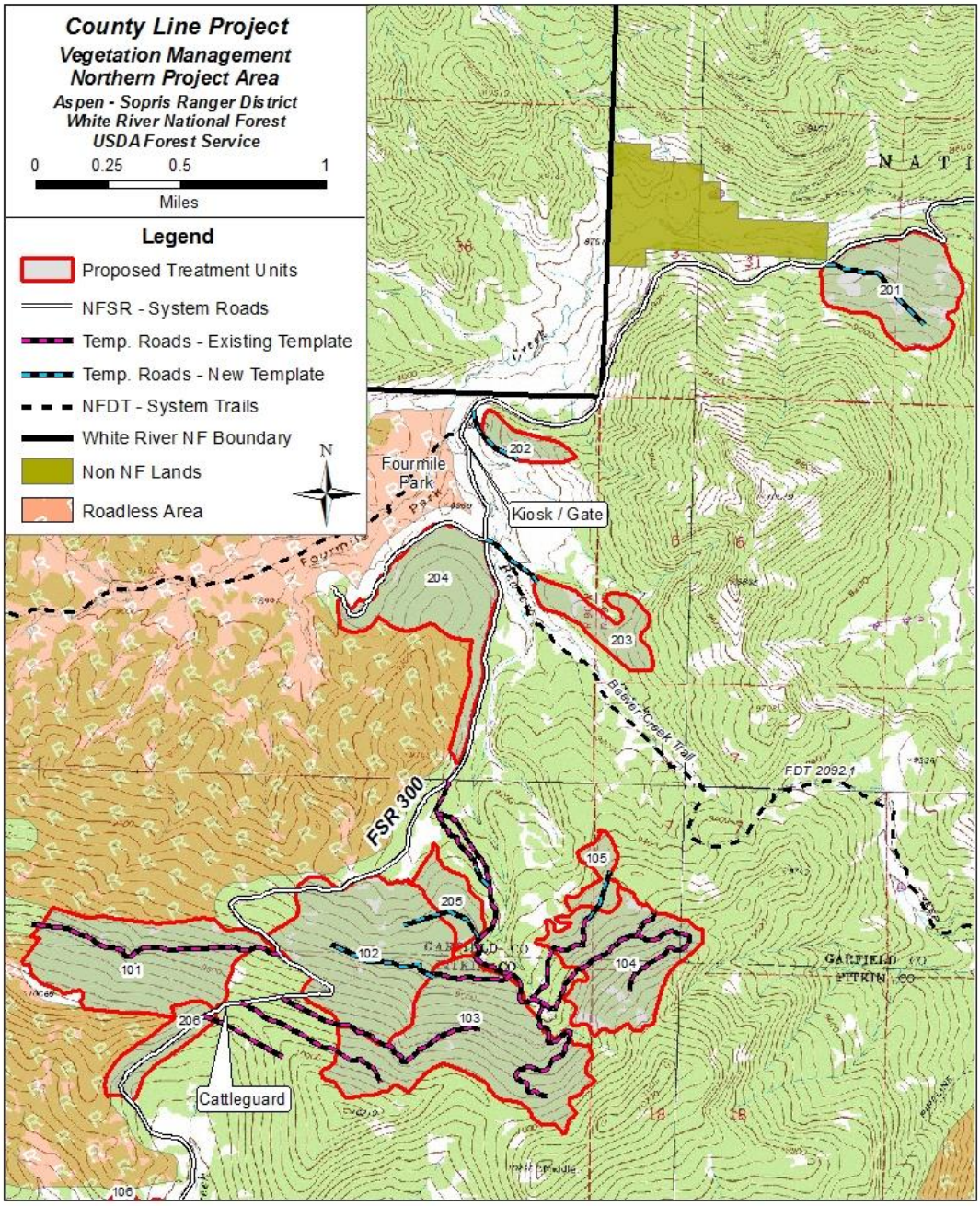
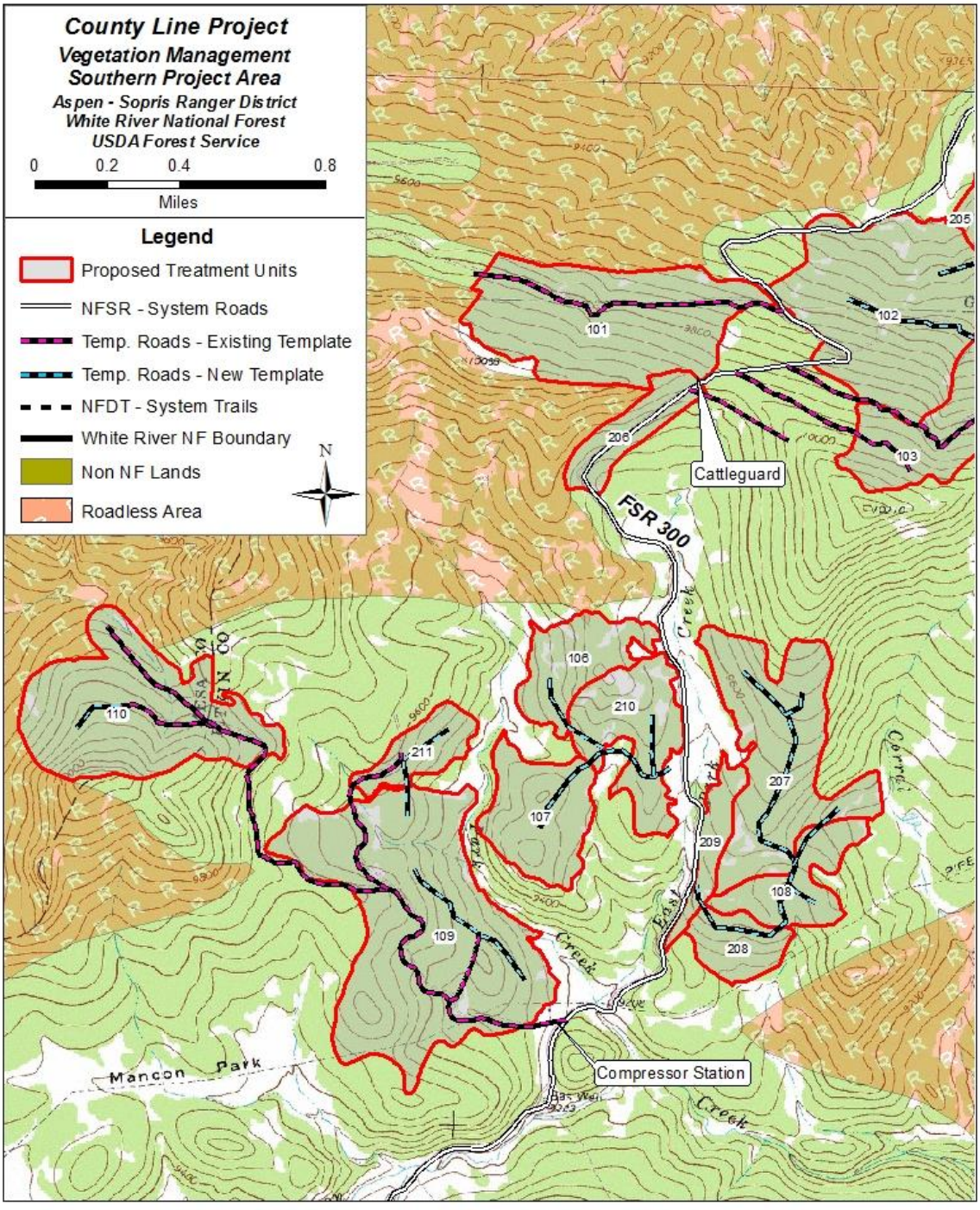


Figure 3: Proposed Vegetation Management Treatment Areas (South)



Transportation

The Proposed Action would use National Forest System Roads, county roads and temporary roads to provide access to proposed treatment areas. Newly constructed temporary roads would be closed to motor vehicle traffic or obliterated following treatment activities.

Table 2: Proposed Haul Routes

Route Number	Route Name	Length (Miles)	Maintenance Level*	Units Accessed	Acres	Loads**
FSR 300.3R	Texas City	0.8	2	204	99	198-297
FSR 300.4A	County Line	0.2	2	101	133	310-443
FSR 301.1	Beaver Pond	0.2	2	102-105, 205	440	1,025-1,465
FSR 320.1	Park Creek	0.3	2	109, 110, 211	373	869-1,242
FSR 300	Fourmile Road	10.0	3	All (101-110, 201-211)	1,597	3,723-5,320
County Road 117	Fourmile Road - Midland Ave.	10.2	Paved	All (101-110, 201-211)	1,597	3,723-5,320

*Maintenance Level 2: High Clearance Vehicles
Maintenance Level 3: Suitable for Passenger Cars
** Load Counts are estimates for chip vans or log trucks based on similar projects on the White River National Forest.

The number of log trucks or chip vans that can be expected on haul routes varies based on a number of factors, including weather, operational restrictions, and equipment issues. However, on average during active operations 7-10 log trucks or chip vans would be expected on haul routes per day.

Temporary Roads

Approximately 14.8 miles of temporary road would be needed to complete harvesting activities. Approximately 10.6 miles of temporary road has an existing road template in place, and approximately 4.2 miles of new temporary road construction would be needed. All temporary roads would be closed to the public for both motorized and mechanized use while operations are occurring. Following harvesting activities, newly constructed temporary roads would be obliterated. Some temporary roads would use existing roads that that White River Travel Management Plan identifies as not needed or decommissioned. A timber sale or stewardship contract would require decommissioning these roads after harvested trees are removed from the treatment unit. Decommissioning may include but is not limited to re-contouring the road prism in select locations, removing existing culverts, ripping and seeding the roadbed, placing stumps, slash, logs and rocks in the road prism, rounding back slopes, constructing earthen or rock barriers at the beginning of the road system and restoring and/or improving erosion control devices within the road template. It may be determined that some routes will not be decommissioned, but rather returned to storage and retained for future entry. These routes will be closed to public motorized and mechanized use and after harvest activities are complete will look much the same as they do at present.

Table 3: Proposed Temporary Roads

Temporary Road #	Route Name	Units Accessed	Length (Miles)	Existing Template
NFSR 300.4A	County Line Road	101	0.7	Yes
NFSR 300.4C	Old Fourmile Clearcut	103	0.6	Yes
NFSR N300SP.3	SP – Park Creek	109	0.2	Yes
NFSR 301.1	Beaver Pond	102-105, 205	0.8	Yes
NFSR 301.1A	---------	104, 105	0.4	Yes
NFSR 301.1C	---------	102, 103	0.3	Yes
NFSR 301W.1A	MP 5.5 Camp DC Road	102-105, 205	0.2	Yes
NFSR 301W.2A	County Line Skid Road	104	0.1	Yes
NFSR 301.2B	Beaver Spur NO. 2	103	0.8	Yes
NFSR 301.2C	Beaver Spur NO. 3	104	1.0	Yes
NFSR 320.1	Park Creek	109, 110, 211	2.0	Yes
NFSR 320.1A	Park Creek Spur #1	109, 211	0.5	Yes
NFSR 320.1B	Park Creek Spur #2	110	0.4	Yes
NFSR 332.1	Lower Clearcut	102, 103	0.8	Yes
T1	---------	201	0.4	No
T2	---------	202	0.3	No
T3	---------	203	0.3	No
T4	---------	102-105, 205	0.1	Yes
T5	---------	102, 205	0.3	No
T6	---------	104, 105	0.2	Yes
T7	---------	102	0.4	Yes
T8	---------	106, 107, 210	0.5	No
T9	---------	106, 210	0.3	No
T10	---------	210	0.2	No
T11	---------	108, 207-209	1.2	No
T12	---------	207	0.1	No
T13	---------	108, 207	0.2	No
T14	---------	108	0.1	No
T15	---------	109	0.2	Yes
T16	---------	109	0.3	Yes
T17	---------	211	0.2	No
T18	---------	109, 211	0.2	No
T19	---------	110	0.2	No
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Material Source

An existing material source located along FSR 300 at mile marker 7.7 would be used to maintain and repair existing roads within the project area.

Associated Activities

Other activities associated with project implementation that are proposed include mechanical site preparation, regeneration surveys and fill-in planting. Mechanical site preparation may include utilizing a piece of tracked-equipment that disturbs existing vegetation, exposing areas of bare mineral soil. Bare mineral soil exposure would provide favorable conditions for the establishment of Engelmann spruce and aspen seedlings and would decrease competition between establishing seedlings and other vegetation. Mechanical site preparation would be expected to occur after harvesting activities are complete but prior to the start of the first growing season as ground conditions allow. Mechanical site preparation would not occur on every acre, but rather in areas that have a predominate presence of competing vegetation such as grass or carex. Regeneration surveys would be conducted in all regeneration harvest treatment units (coppice and group selection) in the 1st, 3rd and 5th years following the completion of all harvest activities. Fill-in planting with Engelmann spruce may occur within group selection units.

II. Sunlight Ski Area Forest Health

The Forest Service proposes vegetation management activities on approximately 2,390 acres of forested lands located within the Sunlight Ski Area Special Use Permit boundary (Figure 4). Treatments would be designed to meet current and desired forest health conditions. Treatments are not expected to occur on every acre, and it is anticipated 0 to 20 acres would be treated annually.

Proposed treatments include:

- Removing hazard trees to minimize risk of falling trees to the public and resort infrastructure.
- Removing hazard trees as a sanitation or salvage treatment where appropriate, for instance within a 150-foot buffer zone from the edge of a ski run or lift corridor.
- Planting seedlings or transplants to speed up regrowth in key areas.
- Preventing insect attacks of high value trees, which are trees in areas that are most critical for the operation of the ski area.
- Bark beetle attacks (affecting pine, spruce, or Douglas fir species) may be prevented by applying an approved insecticide or anti-aggregative pheromone prior to beetle emergence each year until the threat of infestation is over. This would be applied to trees around structures and selected high value tree islands. In other high value area, prevention (or reducing the rate of spread) could include treating beetle-infested trees by felling and peeling, burning, chipping, or removing the trees prior to beetle emergence.
- Implementing measures to protect young regeneration from damage by skiers in areas where regeneration is highly desirable for resort management activities. Individual tree islands smaller than ½ acre may not be regenerated unless they contribute to resort management functions of trail delineation or wind protection.
- Burning or removing logging-generated slash to reduce ground fuels and to stimulate aspen regeneration. Slash treatments may include chipping and scattering slash.

The majority (92%) of the ski area is comprised of aspen stands or aspen stands mixed with conifer species. The remainder of the forested area is comprised of spruce and fir stands. The

Forest Service has developed a range of silvicultural prescription options that could be implemented within each of the major stand types.

The following stand types were identified within the Sunlight Ski area permit boundary:

Stand Type 1: Stand fragments or individual tree islands
These areas are typically too small to be labeled as an individual stands and they usually occur within existing ski trails. Various trees species are present within these areas including Engelmann spruce, subalpine fir, blue spruce, Douglas-fir, and aspen.

Stand Type 2: Pure aspen and aspen mixed with other tree species (<30%).
These stands are predominately even-aged aspen with patches or scattered individuals of other tree species that comprise less than 30% of the total basal area of the stand. Other tree species that may be present include subalpine fir, Engelmann spruce, Douglas-fir, or Rocky Mountain maple.

Stand Type 3: Mixed conifer - Engelmann spruce and subalpine fir
These stands are comprised of a mix of Engelmann spruce and subalpine fir. Some stands contain an aspen component (<30%). Other conifer species may exist within stands including Douglas-fir or blue spruce. Stands can be even-aged or uneven-aged with well-developed understories.

Stand Type 4: Mixed conifer with aspen
These stands are comprised of a near equal mix of aspen and Engelmann spruce-subalpine fir. Other conifer species may exist within stands including Douglas-fir or blue spruce. Aspen or conifer species typically occur in groups or clumps and may be even-aged, two-aged or uneven-aged.

Silvicultural Prescriptions / Vegetation Treatment Options

The following is a list of silvicultural prescriptions or treatment options that could occur within the identified stand types located within the Sunlight Ski area permit boundary.

Stand Type 1: Stand fragments or individual tree islands

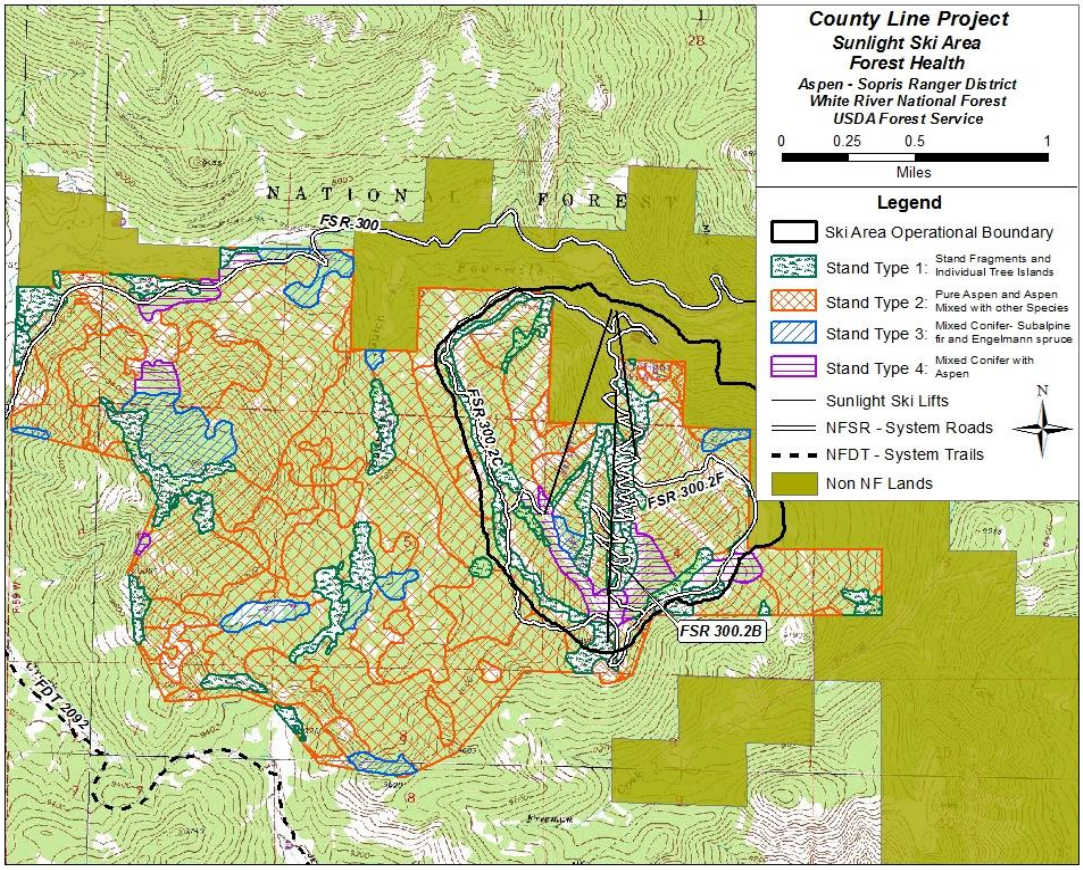
Treatment Option 1.1 – Insecticide or Pheromone Application and Treating Infested Trees (Preventative Action): High value trees would be treated by applying an approved insecticide or by applying an approved anti-aggregation pheromone prior to beetle emergence each year until the threat of infestation is over. In high value areas beetle-infested trees would be treated by felling and peeling, burning, chipping or removing the trees prior to beetle emergence.

***Treatment Option 1.2 – Hazard Tree Removal*:** Hazard trees located within a 150-foot buffer zone from the edge of the stand would be harvested and all other trees would be retained.

Treatment Option 1.3 – Plant Seedlings or Transplants (Regeneration): Trees would be planted in understocked portions where protection from skier or rider damage and shelter

from the harsh elements could be provided. Planting stock could either be nursery grown or transplanted from adjoining areas with sufficient seedling and sapling stock. Protection could either be provided by fencing or other deterrents.

Figure 4: Sunlight Ski Area Forest Health



<u>Stand Type 2: Pure aspen and aspen mixed with other tree species (<30%).</u>
Treatment Option 2.1 – Hazard Tree Removal: Hazard trees located within a 150-foot buffer zone from the edge of the stand would be harvested and all other trees would be retained.

Treatment Option 2.2 – Salvage Harvest: All dead trees within a stand would be harvested up to 30% of the basal area of the stand, and all other trees would be retained.

Treatment Option 2.3 – Regeneration Harvest: Live and dead trees would be harvested in identified areas where aspen regeneration is the priority. Within the existing developed portion of the permit area openings are expected to be small, typically not exceeding 5 acres. Outside the developed ski area, but still within the permit boundary openings may be up to 40 acres in size. Note that unit 201 within the vegetation management proposal is within the ski area permit boundary and is approximately 86 acres in size. The larger proposed opening will be analyzed in the vegetation management section of the proposed action and is not part of the Sunlight Ski area Forest Health proposal.

Stand Type 3: Mixed conifer - Engelmann spruce and subalpine fir

***Treatment Option 3.1 – Hazard Tree Removal*:** Hazard trees located within a 150-foot buffer zone from the edge of the stand would be harvested and all other trees would be retained.

Treatment Option 3.2 - Insecticide or Pheromone Application and Treating Infested Trees (Preventative Action): High value trees would be treated by applying an approved insecticide or by applying an approved anti-aggregation pheromone prior to beetle emergence each year until the threat of infestation is over. In high value areas beetle-infested trees would be treated by felling and peeling, burning, chipping or removing the trees prior to beetle emergence.

Stand Type 4: Mixed conifer with aspen

Treatment Type 4.1 - Hazard Tree Removal: Hazard trees located within a 150-foot buffer zone from the edge of the stand would be harvested and all other trees would be retained.

Treatment Type 4.2 - Insecticide or Pheromone Application and Treating Infested Trees (Preventative Action): High value trees would be treated by applying an approved insecticide or by applying an approved anti-aggregation pheromone prior to beetle emergence each year until the threat of infestation is over. In high value areas beetle-infested trees would be treated by felling and peeling, burning, chipping or removing the trees prior to beetle emergence.

Treatment Type 4.3 - Salvage Harvest: All dead trees within a stand would be harvested up to 30% of the basal area of the stand, and all other trees would be retained.

***Treatment Type 4.4 - Regeneration Harvest*:** Live and dead trees would be harvested in identified areas where aspen or spruce and fir regeneration is the priority. Within the existing developed portion of the permit area where aspen regeneration is desired, openings are expected to be small, typically not exceeding 5 acres. Outside the developed ski area, but still within the permit boundary openings that emphasize aspen regeneration may be up to 40 acres in size. Within the ski area permit boundary openings that emphasize spruce and fir regeneration would not exceed 2 acres in size.

Implementation Methods

Mechanical Felling

Mechanical felling would consist of using ground-based machinery to harvest trees and remove them from the stand. Conventional logging equipment typically includes harvesters, rubber tired and tracked skidders, stroke de-limbers, chip vans and log trucks. Trees could be processed (limbed and cut to length) in the forest or at a landing, provided all design features for fuel loading and coarse woody retention are adhered to. Mechanical equipment would not be used on slopes greater than 40%, except as described below. Mechanical equipment may be used over-the-snow.

Hand Felling with Limited Mechanical Felling

In areas with slopes greater than 40% or wetland areas or where access by mechanical means is not possible, other methods may be used such as hand felling, over-the-snow skidding, helicopter yarding, cable yarding, or burning on-site. Hand felling would consist of using chainsaw crews to fell trees. In most areas, trees would be felled so that the boles of trees lie directly on the surface of the ground to enhance decomposition. Limbs and some tree boles would be piled and burned or chipped to reduce flashy fuel accumulations. In some cases, trees may be winched out of the stand, cable yarded or helicopter yarded. In these units, a small amount of ground-based machinery may be used to treat vegetation if a site visit indicates that doing so would not be contradictory to design features established in this analysis.

III. Fire and Fuels (Prescribed Fire and other Fuels Treatments)

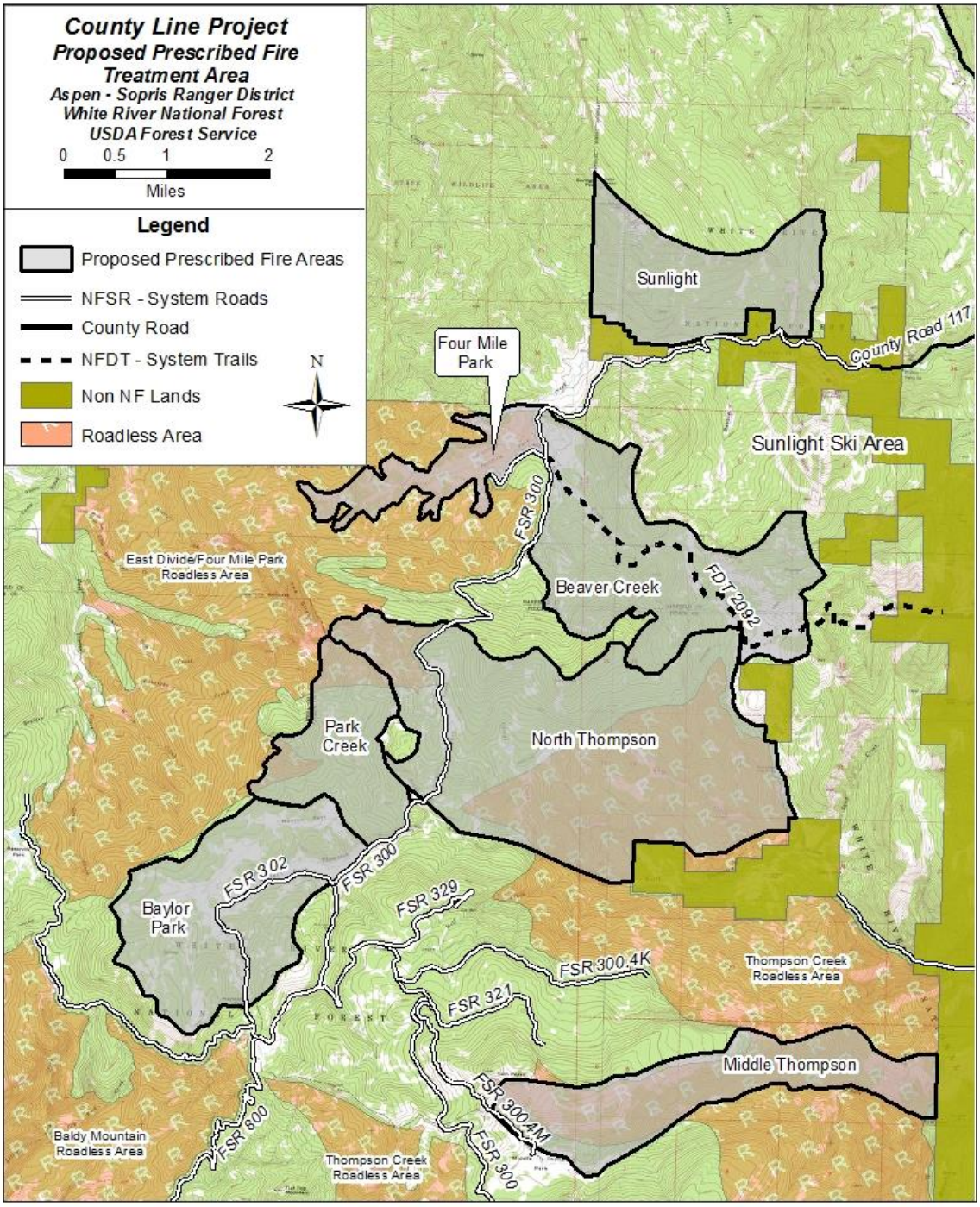
Areas proposed to be treated with prescribed fire contain a variety of vegetation types including aspen, grass, and brush/shrub species (Figure 5). In many of these areas the vegetation is classified as condition class 2, meaning that the vegetation is moderately altered from the historical range of variation and typically one or more historic fire return intervals have been missed. Prescribed fire can be used as a tool to reintroduce fire back into an area. Prescribed fire treatments can reduce hazardous fuel accumulations thereby reducing the risk to life, property and natural resources. Wildlife would also greatly benefit from these treatments by promoting regeneration of both aspen and mountain brush species. Prescribed fire is proposed in the following areas:

Table 4: Proposed Prescribed Fire Treatment Areas

Name	Acres	Target Species for Prescribed Fire
Sunlight Aspen	1,428	Aspen, Shrubland
Four Mile Park	672	Aspen, Grass/Forb, Shrubland
Beaver Creek Aspen	2,355	Aspen, Grass/Forb, Shrubland
North Thompson	4,469	Aspen, Grass/Forb, Shrubland
Park Creek	1,026	Aspen, Shrubland
Baylor Park	2,082	Aspen, Grass/Forb, Activity Slash
Middle Thompson	1,629	Aspen, Grass/Forb, Shrubland
Total	**13,661**	

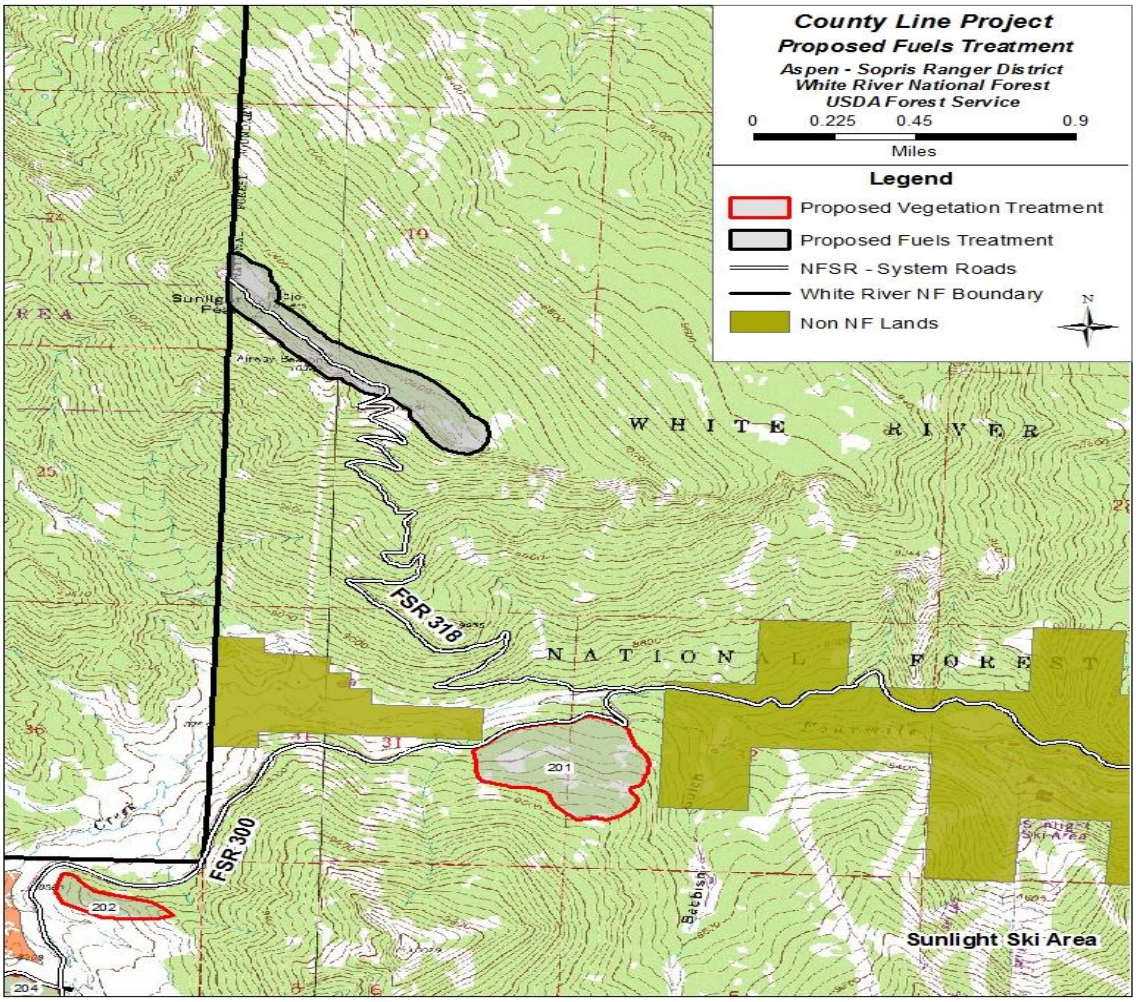
All fire treatments would follow prescribed burn plans developed for site specific environmental and human resources. Prior to setting fires, crews would establish control lines as needed to manage its spread. Fire lines would be constructed by hand. Natural barriers, existing firebreaks and wet lines may be used where appropriate. Existing roads, trails, and snow cover are often effective firebreaks employed for this purpose. No heavy equipment would be used for line construction. Prescribed fire units would be broadcast burned in spring or fall either by hand or using aerial ignition methods.

Figure 5: Proposed Prescribed Fire Areas



At the Sunlight Communications Site allow permittees to reduce fuel loading adjacent to existing communication infrastructure (Figure 6). Treatments include hand thinning stands and limbing residual trees within 300 feet of existing infrastructure. Thinning treatments would remove live and dead trees and existing downed fuels. Treated fuels would be piled and burned or chipped.

Figure 6: Sunlight Communications Site



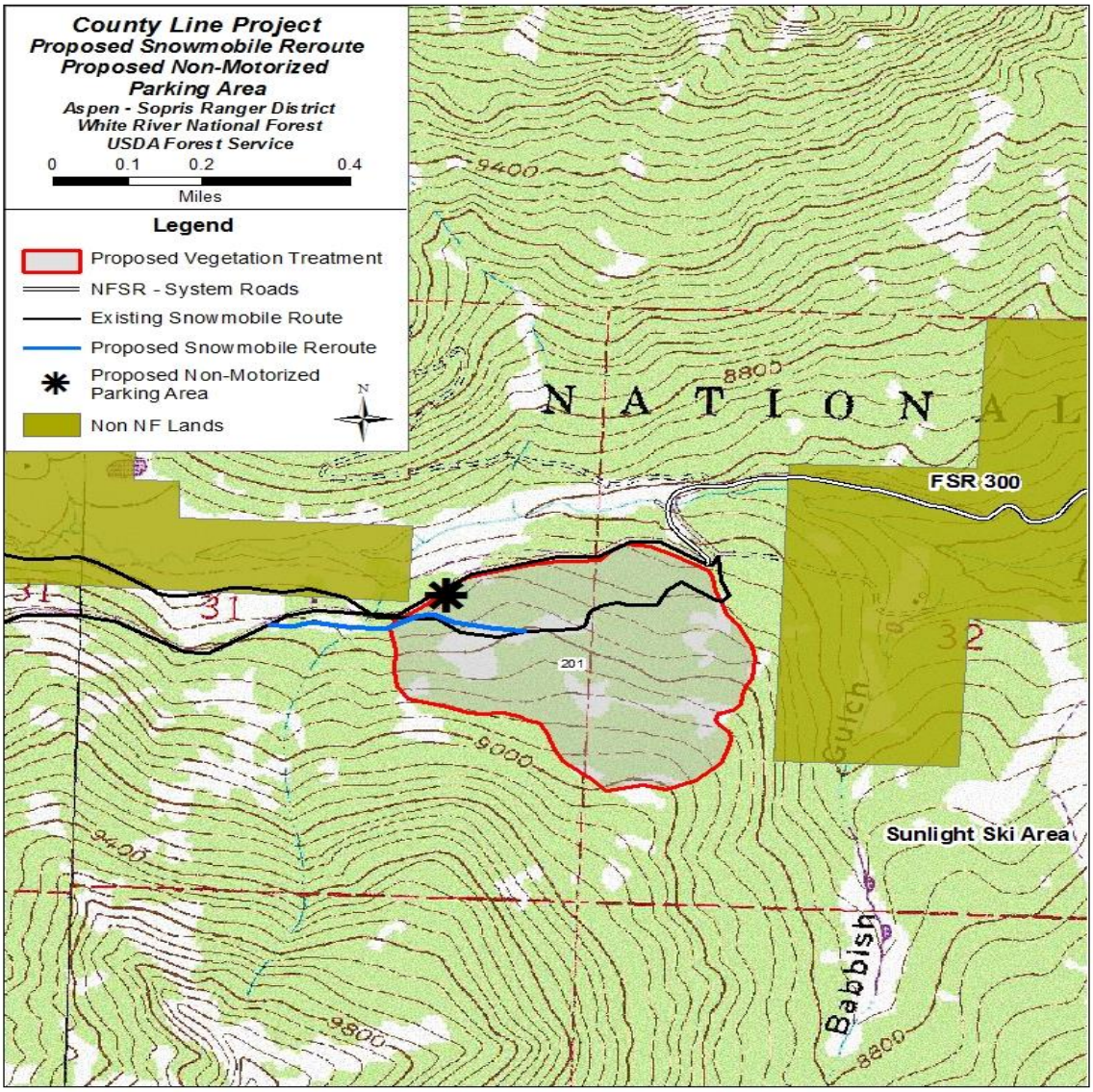
IV. Recreation Enhancements

The following projects were brought forward by resource specialists to enhance recreational opportunities, reduce conflicts between user groups, and to provide for public safety.

Construct a parking area for winter non-motorized users of FSR 300. The parking area would accommodate approximately 10 vehicles (Figure 7). Currently, non-motorized users park along FSR 300, just below the cattle guard. Snowmobilers park farther down FSR 300 in a parking lot more suitable for snowmobile trailers. Create a snowmobile route

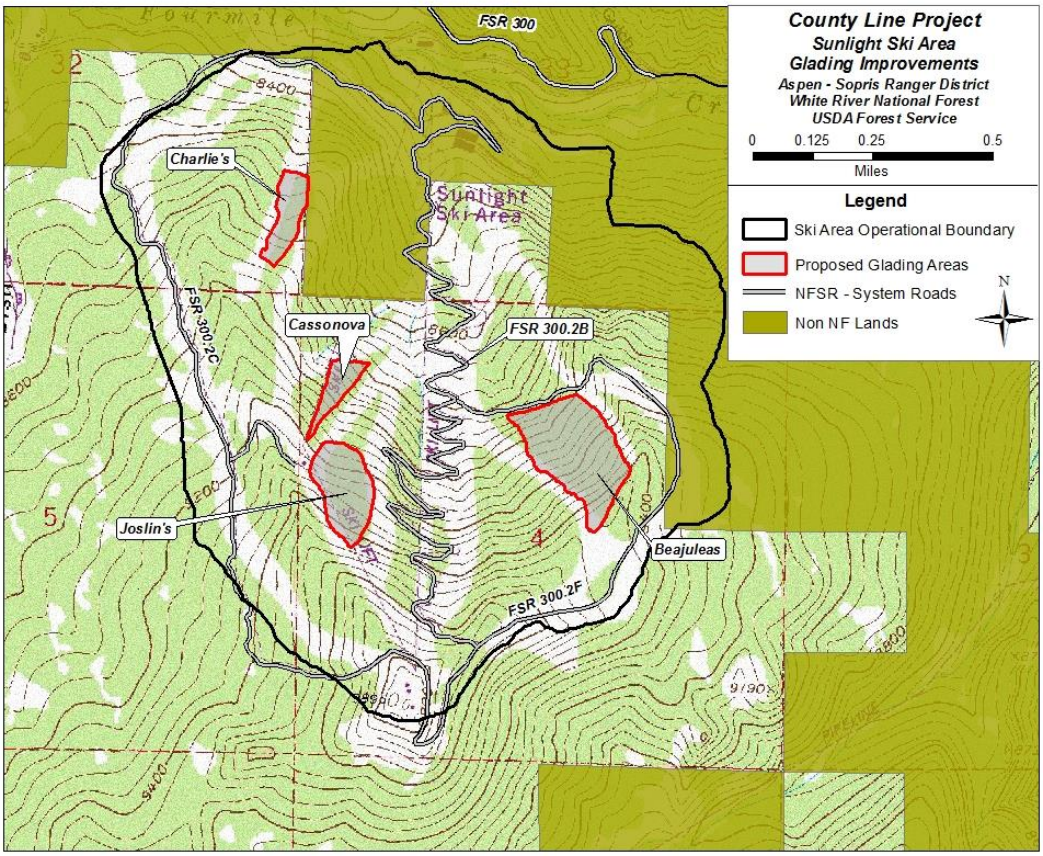
approximately 0.36 miles long that would reduce conflicts between non-motorized and motorized winter users along FSR 300 at the cattle guard. This route would separate use for a short period, allowing users to disperse before coming back together on the road. Non-motorized users (backcountry skiers) typically use the area as access to Williams Peak so are not on FSR 300 for very long.

Figure 7: Proposed Parking Area



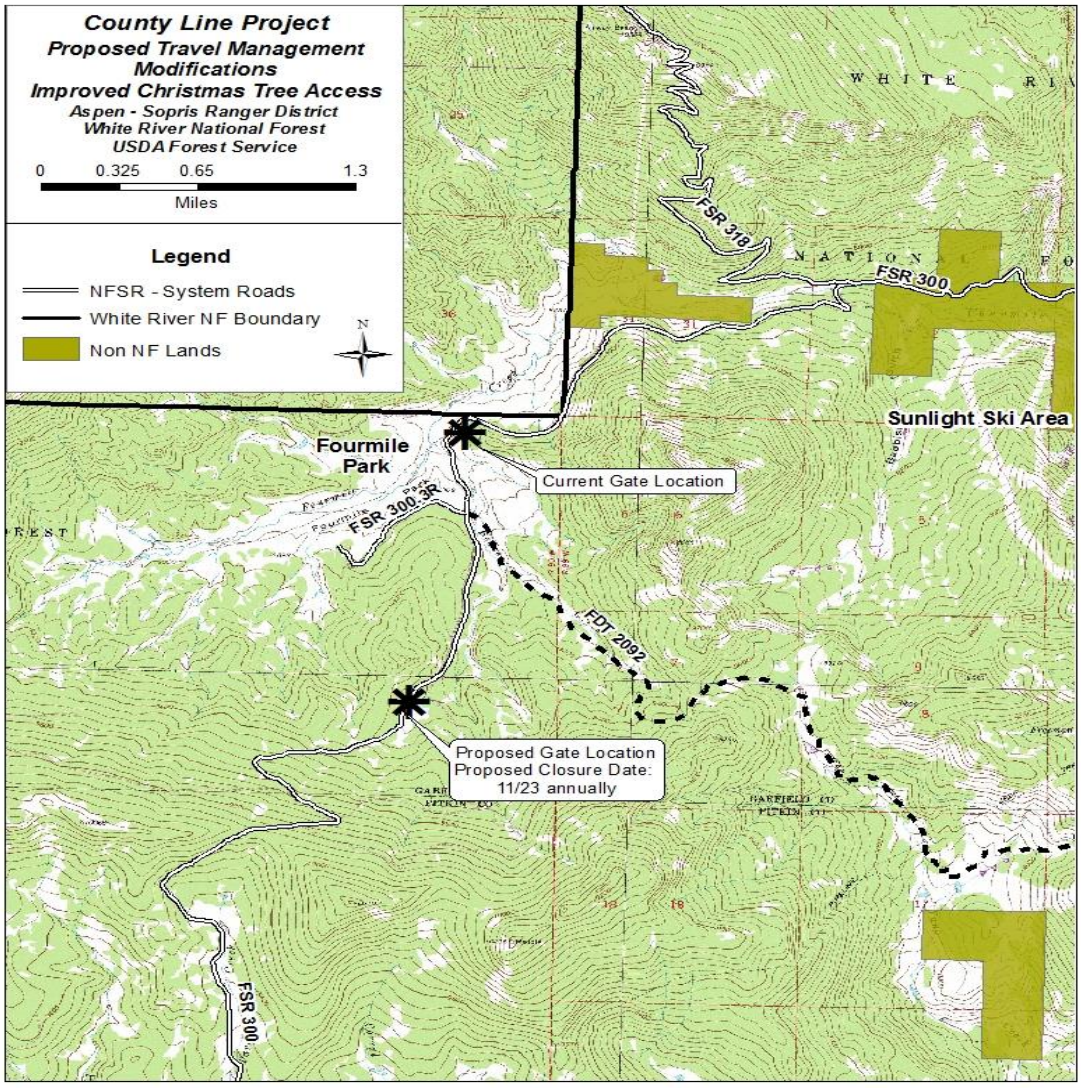
Increase opportunities for gladed skiing and snowboarding at Sunlight ski area. Ski Sunlight has identified 47 acres for tree glading within the existing permit boundary. Glading treatments would remove up to 30% of the basal area within the stand. Trees that are cut would either be removed from the site or pile and burned by the ski area.

Figure 8: Proposed Glading on Sunlight Ski Area



Allow wheeled vehicle traffic farther south on FSR 300 to provide an opportunity for increased access to Christmas tree collection areas. The existing gate at the FSR 300 kiosk would be relocated approximately 1.5 to 2 miles south on FSR 300. The exact gate location would be determined based on existing topography adjacent to the road surface. The gate would be closed on 11/23 in accordance with the White River National Forest Travel Management Plan.

Figure 9: Proposed Gate Location

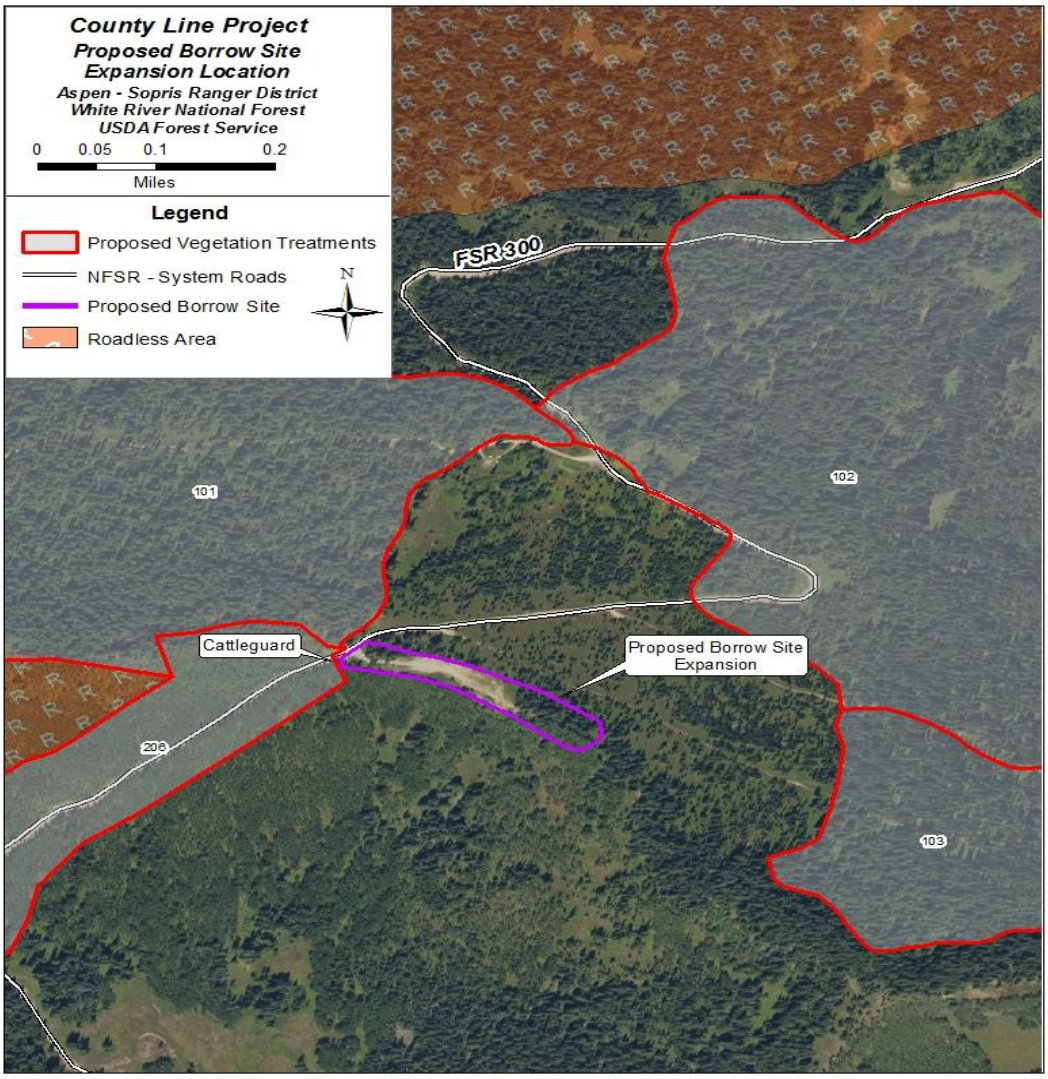


V. Expansion of County Borrow Site

Expanding the developed area of the County Line Borrow Site to allow further production of rock material for use in maintenance and reconstruction of roads and other facilities. Subsurface investigation by drilling or other means would be used to assess the quality and volume of material available for long term needs. It is anticipated that approximately 30,000 cubic yards may be excavated and removed over a period of ten to twenty years. The site would also be used to store stockpiled material for use as needed. The area of surface disturbance would increase from the existing approximate 1.5 acres to approximately 4.6 acres. Vegetation removal would include grass, shrubs and some standing timber. Access to

the quarry is directly from Fourmile Road 300.3. The existing gate may be replaced as part of the development to restrict future access to the quarry.

Figure 10: Borrow Site Location



Management Direction

Forest Plan Standard – Openings Greater than 40 Acres

The proposed action includes treatment units that are larger than 40 acres as well as treatment units adjacent to each other that when combined are greater than 40 acres. Forest Plan Standards set the maximum size of even-aged management units at 40 acres with the following exceptions:

- When proposals for larger openings are approved by the Regional Forester after a 60-day public review
- When larger openings are the result of natural catastrophic conditions or
- When the area that is cut does not meet the definition of created openings.

All areas proposed for coppice cutting meet the definition of created openings. This project is being submitted for a 60 day comment period in accordance with this standard. Following the formal comment period the project will be submitted to the Regional Forester for approval.

Forest Plan Goals and Objectives

The proposed action aligns with goals, objectives, and strategies from the 2002 White River National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan pgs. 1-3 – 1-15) specifically;

Goal 1 Ecosystem Health
Promote ecosystem health and conservation using a collaborative approach to sustain the nation's forests, grasslands and watersheds.

Objective 1a – Improve and protect watershed conditions to provide the water quality and quantity and soil productivity necessary to support ecological functions and intended beneficial uses.

Objective 1d – Increase the amount of forest and rangelands restored to or maintained in a healthy condition with reduced risk and damage from fires, insects, disease and invasive species.

Strategy 1.d.7 – Implement management practices, including prescribed fire, that will move landscapes towards desired vegetation composition and structure as described in the management area description and the Historic Range of Variability.

Strategy 1.d.9 – Over the life of the plan, management practices that mimic ecological processes, such as fire insect and disease, and other disturbances, will operate on forest and grassland landscapes in a manner consistent with desired conditions and management area direction.

Objective 1e – Work cooperatively with individuals, organizations, local, state, tribal and other federal agencies to promote ecosystem health and sustainability across landscapes.

Goal 2 Multiple Benefits to People
Provide a variety of uses, products and services for present and future generations by managing within the capability of sustainable ecosystems.

Objective 2c – Improve the capability of national forest and rangelands to sustain desired uses, values, products and services.

Strategy 2.c.1 – By the end of the plan period, offer for sale the allowable timber sale quantity.

Goal 4 Effective Public Service
Ensure the acquisition and use of an appropriate corporate infrastructure to enable the efficient delivery of a variety of uses.

Objective 4a – Improve the safety and economy of Forest Service roads, trails, facilities and operations and provide greater security for the public and employees.

Strategy 4a.1 – Within five years of plan approval, conduct appropriate maintenance on 25 percent of the Forest Development Transportation System each year.

Goal 5 Public Collaboration
Engage the American public, interested organizations, private landowners, state and local governments, federal agencies and others in the stewardship of National Forest System Lands.

Objective 5a – Work cooperatively with individuals and organizations, local, state, tribal, and federal governments to promote ecological, economic and social health and sustainability across landscapes.

Strategy 5a.1 – Provide opportunities for local governmental jurisdictions and other interested parties to participate in planning and management of National Forest System lands, especially where local governmental jurisdictions or other landowners are contiguous to or may be affected by the management of these lands.

Forest Plan Management Area Direction

The project area is located within the following Forest Plan-designated management areas:

Management Area 4.3 – Dispersed Recreation
These areas are managed to provide undeveloped recreation opportunities in natural or natural-appearing landscapes. A broad range of management activities, including grazing, may occur. Resource management activities are compatible with, and reduce impacts to, recreation resources and opportunities. Biological communities are maintained or improved to provide an attractive setting for visitors, complement the recreational values, and provide varied plant communities, structural stages, and associated wildlife (Forest Plan, Chapter 3, pg. 3-44).

Approximately 111 acres of vegetation management activities and 172 acres of prescribed fire are proposed for treatment in this management area. Increased access for Christmas tree collection areas is also proposed in this management area.

Management Area 5.12 – General Forest and Rangelands – Range Vegetation Emphasis
These areas are managed for the sustainability of the physical, biological, and scenic values of general forest and rangelands, while emphasizing forage production for livestock. Habitat and vegetation are managed to achieve and maintain the desired vegetation condition for livestock, wildlife, and recreational stock. A variety of forested and non-forested plant communities and successional stages are maintained through a combination of human manipulations and natural processes. A diversity of desired plant and wildlife species is represented within the capability of the habitat (Forest Plan, Chapter 3, pgs. 3-51 – 3-52).

Approximately 1,028 acres of vegetation management activities and 5,417 acres of prescribed fire are proposed for treatment in this management area.

Management Area 5.13 – Resource Production – Forest Products
These lands are managed to provide commercial wood products. In addition, they provide for forage production, other commercial products, scenic quality, diversity of wildlife, and a variety of other goods and services. Numerous open roads provide commercial access and

roaded recreational opportunities while closed roads provide non-motorized opportunities. The desired condition of this management area is to maintain suitable forest areas with commercially valuable species at ages, densities, and sizes that allow growth rates and stand health conducive to providing a sustained yield of forest products. A full array of silvicultural systems will be used that will produce a range of successional stages from seedlings to late-successional stands (Forest Plan, Chapter 3, pgs. 3-53 – 3-54).

Approximately 263 acres of vegetation management activities and 1,120 acres of prescribed fire are proposed for treatment in this management area.

Management Area 5.4 – Forested Flora and Fauna Habitats
These areas are primarily forested ecosystems intermingled with grassland and shrub communities, and are managed to provide a mix of ecological and human needs. These needs include wildlife and aquatic habitats, livestock forage, and forest products. These areas also provide for recreational opportunities, scenic quality, and a variety of other miscellaneous goods and services. These areas provide for a variety of forest and non-forest plant communities and successional stages, over the long term, through a combination of human manipulation and natural processes. Management activities are influenced by biological processes found in the area, and strive to replicate local natural vegetation patterns ad patch size (HRV). Vegetation management is designed to simulate natural disturbances, thus silvicultural treatments may be larger than 40 acres in size. Vegetation composition and structure exist in a range of successional stages to meet wildlife and aquatic habitat, livestock forage, and forest product objectives. Timber harvest rotation ages will pattern historical ranges of variability. Management activities will provide adequate late successional structure components in forested stands and will maintain fire-dependent ecosystems over the long term (Forest Plan, Chapter 3, pgs. 3-55 – 3-56).

Approximately 109 acres of vegetation management activities and 1,880 acres of prescribed fire are proposed for treatment in this management area.

Management Area 5.43 – Elk Habitat
These areas are managed for elk. Low road densities and optimum forage and cover ratios characterize this management area prescription. Vegetation is managed to provide healthy plant communities with a variety of species present for food and cover. Forested areas may appear managed without much evidence of damage by insects and disease. Natural and created openings or meadows of various sizes and shapes occur as well. Large patches of late-successional structure, including trees of many different heights, occur. Scattered dead trees appear in openings and in older stands. Most of the local road surfaces are covered with grasses or other vegetation unless they have been recently used to haul logs. In such cases, the vegetation may be worn down (Forest Plan, Chapter 3, pgs. 3-61 – 3-69).

Approximately 5,068 acres of prescribed fire are proposed for treatment in this management area. Approximately 80 acres are proposed to be treated, to create defensible space at the Sunlight Communications site.

Management Area 8.25 – Ski Areas – Existing and Potential
Ski areas are developed and operated by the private sector to provide opportunities for intensively managed outdoor recreation activities during all seasons of the year. This management are also includes areas with potential for future development. Management areas are characterized by a vegetational mosaic that includes natural and man-made grassy openings intermixed with forested or partially forested areas and rocky outcroppings. Forested areas are managed as sustainable cover with a variety of species and age classes in patterns typical of the natural landscape character of the area. Vegetation is managed to avoid catastrophic changes that could result from windthrow, insects, disease, or fire. Disturbed areas are revegetated to protect scenery and minimize erosion (Forest Plan, Chapter 3, pgs. 3-80 – 3-83).

Approximately 86 acres of vegetation management activities are proposed for treatment in this management area. Approximately 47 acres of tree glading are proposed at the Sunlight ski area, and approximately 2,390 acres of vegetation management activities are proposed to maintain or improve forest health within the permitted boundary of the Sunlight ski area.

Management Area 8.32 – Designated Utility Corridors – Existing and Potential
This prescription emphasizes management of existing and potential linear and non-linear rights-of-way corridors. These corridors are used for major oil and gas pipelines; major water transmission systems (excluding reservoirs); slurry pipelines; aerial and underground utility facilities for transmission of electricity; major communications systems including telephone, microwave, and fixed sites; railroad rights-of-way; and major routes for highways and roads. For existing corridors and sites, visitors can expect to see significant modifications to general forest areas. Larger trees are removed to provide for safety and protection of facilities and of personnel working within the area. Smaller trees are still present. The boundaries of the cut areas bordering the corridors and cleared sites are blended into the surrounding vegetation (Forest Plan, Chapter 3, pgs. 3-85 – 3-89).

Approximately 2 acres are proposed to be treated, to create defensible space at the Sunlight Communications site.

The project will be designed to conform to the Forest Plan and all other laws, regulations and policies. Forest Plan standards and guidelines will be applied as appropriate to meet Forest Plan goals and desired conditions.

Nature of Decision to be Made

For this project, the responsible official is the Aspen-Sopris District Ranger, Karen Schroyer. Given the purpose and need, the responsible official will review the environmental analysis of the proposed action, other alternatives, and any public comments in order to make the following decisions:

1. Whether the proposed action will proceed as proposed, as modified by an alternative, or not at all?
2. If it proceeds:

a. What design features/mitigation measures and monitoring requirements should be applied to the proposed action?
b. Does the project require a Forest Plan amendment?

Public Involvement

The project was first listed in the Schedule of Proposed Actions in October, 2017 and updates are provided quarterly. Further information about this project can be found on our website at http://www.fs.fed.us/nepa/fs-usda-pop.php/?project=52653

Alternatives to the Proposed Action

No Action

The EA may document consideration of a no-action alternative through the effects analysis by contrasting the impacts of the proposed action and any alternative(s) with the current condition and expected future condition if the proposed action were not implemented (36 CFR 220.7(b)(2(ii). Under the No Action Alternative, natural processes would continue and vegetation management, recreation enhancement and fuels treatments would not occur. The area would continue to be used for recreation, personal use forest product gathering, hunting and grazing.

Effects and Issues to Consider

The environmental assessment will address the effects of the proposed action and alternatives to the following: wildlife habitat, aquatic species, botany, cultural resources, soils, scenery hydrology, watershed health, noxious weeds, recreation, range, economics, forest vegetation and fuels. The assessment will be issue-driven and contain detail commensurate to the degree to which a resource may be affected.

Issues are unresolved conflicts that arise as a result of the proposed action. At this time, the Forest Service has not identified any issues but will use information gathered from this comment period to identify issues to be addressed.

Issues raised in response to this notice of proposed action will be considered and addressed in the environmental analysis. Some issues may be addressed through modification of the proposed action, development of a new alternative, or mitigation measures.

Comment Process

The proposed project is an activity implementing a land management plan and subject to the objection process described in 36 CFR 218 Subparts A and B. The Forest Service is combining scoping with the legal notice and opportunity to comment, as described in §218.24. The public is encouraged to provide specific written comments on this proposal, including supporting reasons for the responsible official to consider. Specific written comments are within the scope of and have a direct relationship to the proposed action.

Written comments will be accepted for 60 calendar days following the publication of a legal notice in the *Aspen Times*. The publication date in the newspaper of record is the exclusive

means for calculating the comment period. The regulations prohibit extending the length of the comment period.

Written comments must be submitted via mail, fax, electronically, or in person (Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., excluding holidays) to: Shelby Limberis, c/o Kevin Warner, Acting District Ranger, PO Box 309, Carbondale, Colorado 81623, FAX: (970) 963-1012. Electronic comments including attachments can be submitted to https://cara.ecosystem-management.org/Public/CommentInput?Project=52653.

It is the responsibility of persons providing comments to submit them by the close of the comment period. Only those who submit timely and specific written comments will have eligibility to file an objection under §218.8. For objection eligibility, each individual or representative from each entity submitting timely and specific written comments must either sign the comment or verify identity upon request. Individuals and organizations wishing to be eligible to object must meet the information requirements in §218.25(a)(3). Names and contact information submitted with comments will become part of the public record and may be released under the Freedom of Information Act.

If the agency determines there are no significant impacts, that finding along with the EA and a draft decision notice will be published for a 45-day objection period. If no specific written comments are received during the designated opportunity for comment, the project will not be subject to objection. If the EA concludes there is potential for significant impacts, then an environmental impact statement will need to be prepared.

This Notice of Proposed Action also is requesting your comments under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (NHPA). Consultation under the NHPA seeks to consider the views about an undertaking and its effects on historic properties for the agency official to consider in decision making (36 CFR 800).

Additional information regarding this action can be obtained from: Shelby Limberis, PO Box 309, Carbondale, Colorado 81623, phone # (970) 827-5161 or email at slimberis@fs.fed.us